



News Release

For immediate release: October 6, 2011

(11-153)

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Whooping cough a serious concern for babies in our state

Getting families vaccinated helps protect babies

OLYMPIA — Very young infants in our state are getting pertussis (whooping cough) at much higher rates than people of other ages. The rate of whooping cough in babies is nearly 10 times greater than the combined rate of all people of all ages in Washington. Already this year, 58 infants younger than one year old have been diagnosed with whooping cough. Twenty-two of them were hospitalized, including two that died. Of the 22 babies who were hospitalized, 18 were three months old or younger.

“Whooping cough is a serious illness, especially for babies who are too young to be vaccinated,” said State Health Officer and pediatrician Dr. Maxine Hayes. “Older kids and adults can help protect babies by getting the pertussis vaccine. By being vaccinated, close contacts of infants create a protective ‘cocoon’ for newborns and infants who can’t yet be vaccinated or have not completed their initial vaccine series.”

Kids are back in school and in close contact with each other, increasing the risk for spreading illnesses including whooping cough. [Pertussis](http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Immunize/diseases/pertussis/) (www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Immunize/diseases/pertussis/) is very contagious and spreads easily from person to person through coughing and sneezing and causes [coughing spells](#) so severe that it is hard for infants to eat, drink, or breathe. These spells can last for weeks. It can lead to pneumonia, seizures, and even death. Older kids and adults may have milder symptoms than babies and may mistake their symptoms for a cold or persistent cough while continuing to spread the illness.

A total of 431 cases of whooping cough from 26 counties in our state have been reported so far this year. Last year at this time there were 378 cases. Three counties have had babies hospitalized with confirmed or suspected pertussis within the last two weeks. Notices emphasizing the risk to infants are being sent to healthcare providers by public health agencies in several counties.

— More —

The pertussis vaccine (Tdap) is available for adolescents and adults through age 64. Pregnant women are urged to get vaccinated, as are health care workers of all ages who have contact with infants. People of all ages should get immunized if they have close contact with a baby; this is especially important for siblings of infants, who should be up-to-date on DTaP and other recommended immunizations.

Most people get a series of pertussis vaccines when they're kids, but protection wears off over time. The Department of Health recommends people substitute a Tdap vaccine for a routine tetanus (Td) booster, which is needed every 10 years; people should get it sooner if they're in close contact with young kids or live in an area where there are pertussis cases. There's no minimum time period between getting Td and Tdap vaccines. Only one Tdap vaccine is recommended in a person's lifetime.

The first symptoms of pertussis are like the common cold — sneezing, runny nose, low-grade fever, and a mild cough. Within two weeks, the cough can become severe and can develop into coughing spells followed by a high-pitched whoop in some people. An infected person can spread the disease from the beginning of the cold-like symptoms until three weeks after the coughing episodes start. Antibiotics can reduce the contagious period.

Anyone with a severe cough, especially if it includes fits of coughing or causes vomiting, should get medical care. People who have a severe or persistent cough should stay away from babies, young kids, and pregnant women until tested and/or treated.

More information on preventing whooping cough is available by contacting your [local health agency](#) (www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm) or the Department of Health's [Office of Immunization and CHILD Profile](#) (www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Immunize) at 360-236-3595.

The [Department of Health website](#) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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